

HOKEY POKEY

Every schoolchild in America knows the Hokey Pokey. What you might not know is who wrote the song. Larry LaPrise, aka The Hokey Pokey Man, died recently at age 83 in Boise, leaving behind a career that brought him no fame, modest fortune, and a job with the Postal Service. LaPrise, whose full name was Roland Lawrence LaPrise, concocted the song along with two fellow musicians in the late 1940's for the ski crowd in Sun Valley, Idaho. The group, The Ram Trio, recorded the song in 1949.

In 1953, bandleader Ray Anthony bought the rights and recorded The Hokey Pokey on the B-side of another novelty record, The Bunny Hop. "Everybody was doing the Bunny Hop before long, which meant that everybody was doing The Hokey Pokey," said LaPrise's daughter, Linda Ruby. There followed a steady succession of recordings: Jack Johnson and the Hickory Dickory Singers, Warren Covington with the Tommy Dorsey Orchestra, Cliffie Stone, Jerry Marks, Chubby Checker, Annette Funicello and the Champs. In no time, the Hokey Pokey was everywhere, Schoolyards, Bar mitzvahs, Weddings and Brownie meetings.

Alas, The Hokey Pokey turned out to be the high water mark of LaPrise's musical career—in fact, maybe the only water mark. He wrote several other songs including the Sitz Mark Samba—"You know, the sitz mark is the hole left in the snow after you've gotten up from falling down skiing."

After the Ram Trio disbanded in the 1960's, LaPrise, by then a father of six, went to work for the post office in Ketchum. About the same time, country star Roy Acuff's publishing company bought the rights to The Hokey Pokey. LaPrise later retired with his wife Donna, to Wendell, where their daughter is a schoolteacher.

Song lyrics for the Hokey Pokey by R. Lawrence LaPrise, Charles Peter Macak and Taft Baker:

You put your right hand in

You put your right hand out

You put your right hand in

And you shake it all about

You do the hokey pokey

And you turn yourself around,

and that's what it's all about,

Yeah

Right hand to be followed by: left foot, right arm, left arm, right elbow, left elbow, head and whole self.

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